

TOBACCO USE & QUITTING

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With the approach of a New Year, many people start looking for ways to improve themselves. Many tobacco users decide to quit using tobacco during this time. The cost of tobacco products alone provides motivation for many people. More important, however, are the many health risks associated with tobacco use. Among the lesser-known dental effects is an increase in tooth decay and gum disease. Among the lesser-known medical effects are the destruction of small capillaries through-out the body (which can sometimes lead to minor annoyances such as erectile dysfunction in males), inhibition of healing from wounds and disease, and decreased oxygen-carrying ability by the blood. Other effects such as high blood pressure and cancer have become more widely known in recent years.

Tobacco use, according to recent literature, triples one's risk of heart disease. The risk of getting lung cancer increases 2000%. Smoking has been implicated in 90% of lung cancers among males and 85% among females. Tobacco use of any kind has been implicated in 90% of all oral cancers. Surgical treatments can be drastic, including removal of an entire lung. According to LCDR Moon at Sigonella Hospital, cases of oral cancer can make it necessary to remove all tissue up to 4 centimeters (about an inch in all directions) AROUND the cancer. This can easily mean the removal of half of a person's face, for instance.

With all of the publicity associated with tobacco use, one may wonder why not quit? Unfortunately, nicotine, the addictive substance in tobacco, can be 10 times MORE addictive than heroin, making the task of quitting difficult. Fortunately, NAS Sigonella Hospital's Smoking Cessation Course is available every month to help.

The first step is to stop by the Health Promotion Office for an information package (in the hospital on NAS I, 2nd deck next to the Tricare Office).

Step number 2 is to make an appointment with your provider. Many medications can help you quit, and your provider can get a prescription for one that is right for you.

Step number 3 is to call 624-4710 to join the course. You can also try the online program at www.lungusa.org.

American Medical Center Cancer Research Center and the American Heart Association provided information for this article.